

Title	Introduction to Hélio Oiticica's "The Senses Pointing Towards A New Transformation" (1969)
Type	Article
URL	<a href="https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/13500/">https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/13500/</a>
Date	2018
Citation	Melvin, Jo and Strebowski, Luke (2018) Introduction to Hélio Oiticica's "The Senses Pointing Towards A New Transformation" (1969). ARTMargins, 7 (3). pp. 115-128. ISSN 2162-2574
Creators	Melvin, Jo and Strebowski, Luke

### **Usage Guidelines**

Please refer to usage guidelines at <http://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/policies.html> or alternatively contact [ualresearchonline@arts.ac.uk](mailto:ualresearchonline@arts.ac.uk).

License: Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives

Unless otherwise stated, copyright owned by the author

## INTRODUCTION TO HÉLIO OITICICA'S "THE SENSES POINTING TOWARD A NEW TRANSFORMATION" (1969)

JO MELVIN AND LUKE SKREBOWSKI

Hélio Oiticica's article "The Senses Pointing toward a New Transformation" considers the development of the artist's own work up to 1969 within the broader context of the evolution of both the Brazilian and international neo-avant-gardes of the postwar period. The text was originally written as a talk entitled "The Senses Indicating a Sense of the Whole" and was produced between June 18 and 25, 1969, in London, in the aftermath of Oiticica's one-man show at the White-chapel Gallery (February 25–April 6, 1969) and in response to an invitation to participate in the Touch Art symposium at California State College in Long Beach, held later that year, between July 7 and 12, 1969.<sup>1</sup> After presenting the paper in the United States, Oiticica subsequently revised the text in November with the assistance of the English art critic Guy Brett, retitled it "The Senses Pointing toward a New

1 We are indebted to Paula Braga for informing Luke Skrebowski of the existence of this text, at the conference Transnational Latin American Art from 1950 to the Present Day (1st International Research Forum for Graduate Students and Emerging Scholars), held in 2009 in Austin, Texas, and for directing his attention to a chapter discussing it, excerpted from her 2007 PhD thesis: see Paula Braga, "Conceptualism and Life-Experience," in *Fios Soltos: A Arte de Hélio Oiticica*, ed. Paula Braga (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2008), 277–87, and "Conceitualismo e Vivência" "Conceptualism and Life Experience," in *Hélio Oiticica, Singularidade, Multiplicidade*, ed. Paula Braga (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2013), 159–232. For a discussion of the broader concept of creleisure: see Luke Skrebowski, "Revolution in the Aesthetic Revolution: Hélio Oiticica and the Concept of Creleisure," *Third Text* 114 (2012): 65–78.

Transformation,” and prepared a final copy, dated December 22, 1969, that was marked for submission as an article to the London-based art magazine *Studio International*.<sup>2</sup> Beyond Oiticica’s immediate engagements in London, the broader sociopolitical backdrop against which Oiticica’s intervention played out was the intensification of repression under the military dictatorship in Brazil, and specifically the early days of the presidency of Emílio Garrastazu Médici, which began on October 30, 1969.<sup>3</sup> This development would shortly lead Oiticica to leave Brazil for the United States, living under conditions of self-imposed exile in New York from 1970 to 1978, only to return once the political climate in the country had begun to ameliorate.<sup>4</sup>

The artist hoped to publish his text in the “Artist’s Pages” section of *Studio International*, which had recently played host to the three parts of Joseph Kosuth’s then controversial, now canonical article “Art after Philosophy,” across its October, November, and December 1969 issues.<sup>5</sup> Oiticica had been encouraged to submit to the magazine by its then-editor Peter Townsend, who was enthusiastic about the artist’s work after he had encountered it in London. Oiticica wrote of his hopes for the text in a letter to Lygia Clark in December 1969: “I think this is going to be important on the international scene. Peter Townsend asked me for it, and I’m glad to be able to provide such important material.”<sup>6</sup> Yet, for reasons we will consider below, the text was never published in the magazine (and indeed has not been published anywhere since, until now).<sup>7</sup> As a result, Oiticica’s article was denied the international audience and high-level exposure he had hoped for and legitimately believed

2 The Projeto Hélio Oiticica holds a facsimile of the submitted version of the text (ref: PHO 0486/69), from which the version published here derives. Sincere thanks are offered to the Projeto Hélio Oiticica and César Oiticica for permission to publish the text.

3 For details about Oiticica’s time in London, see Guy Brett and Luciano Figueiredo, eds., *Oiticica in London* (London: Tate Publishing, 2007).

4 Oiticica wrote a text entitled “Brazil Diarrhea” in 1970, as he prepared to leave Rio de Janeiro for New York, which offered a scathing and scatological indictment of the artistic conditions prevailing in the country under the military dictatorship. Hélio Oiticica, “Brazil Diarrhea,” in *Hélio Oiticica*, ed. Chris Dercon (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 1992), exhibition catalog, 17.

5 Joseph Kosuth, “Art after Philosophy: Part I,” *Studio International* 178, no. 915 (October 1969): 134–37; “Art after Philosophy: Part II,” *Studio International* 178, no. 916 (November 1969): 160–61; “Art after Philosophy: Part III,” *Studio International* 178, no. 917 (December 1969): 212–13.

6 Cited in Braga, “Conceitualismo e Vivência,” 212.

7 The text is available in the online archives of the Rio de Janeiro–based Projeto Hélio Oiticica, [www.heliooitica.org.br/home/home.php](http://www.heliooitica.org.br/home/home.php).

LONDON  
b. June 18th 1969  
e.

HÉLIO OITICICA - (for the Long Beach Symposium of "Touch art" - July 14th/12th 1969 <sup>Calif. Spring State College</sup>)

### THE SENSES INDICATING A SENSE OF THE WHOLE

- The process of shifting the aesthetic focus from the vision to the other "forgotten" or "sleep" senses is not, or should not be concentrated in an aesthetic point of view: it is much more profound: it is a process first, in its ultimate sense, related to a new unconditioned behaviour <sup>possibility</sup>; the consciousness of behaviour as a fundamental key to the evolution of the former art-power evolutions → the consciousness of the ~~relation~~ of the relations individual-world as a whole action, where the idea of value is not only related to an specific 'focus': the aesthetic event as the 'focus-goal', as the search for the distant Eidos, or the Apollonian-Dionysiac counteraction: those conflict contradictions tend to be absorbed into the behaviour itself, away from visual focus, super-intellectualized and ~~the world~~ submitted to that 'focus-value' relation; the appeal to the senses, the 'multi-focal' counteraction, becomes important as a way towards this behavioural absorption: smell - ~~touch~~ - taste - ~~and hearing~~ and touch mingle in the ~~world~~ Merleau-Ponty once defined as the "body's general symbolics", where all the sense-relations are established in a direct-human context, as a "body" of significations, and not a sum of detached significations apprehended by specific channels; the apprehension and the action cannot be isolated, and the analytical idea of senses becomes a simple metaphor, too analytically poor to express the complexity of human behaviour. But, as we move from the rational, 'objectal relations' of art-problems, of established conditions for an "aesthetic action" so much developed during so many years, into the idea of a whole-human world, into the trust in behavioural action as a creative force and not a ~~step~~ or ~~background~~ <sup>possibility</sup> one: the dissolution of "art" into it is not also an 'objectal dissolution' but a flowing of concentrated specific ideas, fundamental problem-creative ideas, into life manifestation as far as the infinite area of human behaviour is concerned, as a building up of significations, symbolic bodies of relations, so rich in themselves and re-informed, then,

that the article deserved.<sup>8</sup> As such, a text that would have offered a contrasting position to Kosuth's on the trajectory of art after objecthood, outlining equally significant, though fundamentally different, ideas about art, did not enter the original international discourse on the neo-avant-gardes mediated by *Studio International*.

#### ON NOT APPEARING

Although "The Senses Pointing toward a New Transformation" is profoundly inflected by Oiticica's formation within the Lusophone Brazilian neo-avant-garde, evidence suggests that it was originally composed and subsequently revised and redrafted entirely in the artist's distinctive, highly neologistic English, replete with symbols, portmanteau words (such as "crebehavior"), and nonstandard grammar (as in his use of the prefix "un-").<sup>9</sup> Oiticica's inventive treatment of language has been justly described by Catherine David as "plurilinguistic," characterized by a mixing "of Portuguese, English and French" as well as "hieroglyphs."<sup>10</sup> One could perhaps describe Oiticica's English as a unique, highly theoretical "creolization" of three European colonial languages. Oiticica's text also employs a series of unglossed technical terms ("non-object," "body-symbolics," "probject," "Apocalypopotesis"), the comprehensibility of which depends on a detailed knowledge of the Brazilian avant-garde and its evolution that has only recently become more widely available to readers working within Anglophone art history and criticism.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, we suggest that the text was always already a multi-

8 Oiticica published an abbreviated version of some of the ideas articulated in the essay in his contribution to the catalog accompanying Kynaston McShine's *Information* (1970) exhibition at MoMA, but the text was radically truncated as well as superimposed on an image of his *Bed Bolide*, which impaired its legibility.

9 As we note at the start of the Document, Oiticica's final typescript of the article is reproduced here with minimal emendations, in order to preserve its distinctive character.

10 Catherine David, "The Great Labyrinth," in Dercon, *Hélio Oiticica*, 251.

11 Guy Brett's work is the exception to this general rule, since he has supported Oiticica's work—and sought to mediate it in Anglophone contexts—since the 1960s. Major recent examples of scholarship on Oiticica's work in English include: Sabeth Buchmann and Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz, *Hélio Oiticica and Neville D'Almeida: Block-Experiments in Cosmococa—Program in Progress* (London: Afterall, 2013); Sérgio B. Martins, *Constructing an Avant-Garde: Art in Brazil, 1949–1979* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013); and Irene V. Small, *Hélio Oiticica: Folding the Frame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016). Important contributions are also to be found in the following major exhibition catalogs: Dercon, *Hélio Oiticica*; Mari Carmen Ramírez, ed., *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Colour* (London: Tate Publishing, 2007); and Lynne Zelevansky, ed., *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium* (Munich: Prestel, 2016).



directional translation—indeed, Oiticica’s own autotranslation—that explicated his treatment of core concepts of the Brazilian neo-avant-garde as elaborated in dialogue with the international neo-avant-garde. As such, it was aimed at a projected international audience of readers such as Oiticica himself, who spoke English as a koiné language (English as the new lingua franca), as much as at the native speakers of the Anglosphere.

Against any narrow nationalism, Oiticica, along with other Brazilian artists, used his own “missed encounters abroad—mainly with conceptual art,” as Sérgio Bruno Martins has observed, to displace “linguistic, cultural and geographic certainties.”<sup>12</sup> Our proposal here is to consider precisely the missed encounter at stake in the nonpublication of “The Senses Pointing toward a New Transformation,” in order to challenge “canonical provincialism”—Michael Asbury’s term for the narrow purview of the mainstream historiography of the Anglophone avant-garde, but one that also offers a challenge to the historiography of the global(ized) neo-avant-gardes.<sup>13</sup> At the time of its writing in 1969, Oiticica’s text apparently proved a displacement too far for the editors of *Studio International*, resulting in its nonpublication. Our aim is to stimulate a more widespread reception and appreciation of “The Senses Pointing toward a New Transformation” today, by way of a reparative reading that is sensitively attuned to the essay’s particular historical stakes and temporality. In this way we hope to position Oiticica’s text within wider debates about the neo-avant-garde that its original nonappearance had foreclosed but that can now be effected as part of the ongoing revisionist rereading of this period.

Some additional contextualization can help inform this point. In October 1965, Peter Townsend was appointed editor of *Studio International* by its new owners (the publishing firm Cory Adams Mackay), who tasked him with reviving the magazine’s declining reputation.<sup>14</sup>

12 Martins, *Constructing an Avant-Garde*, 13.

13 Michael Asbury, “Neoconcretism and Minimalism: Cosmopolitanism at a Local Level and a Canonical Provincialism,” in *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, ed. Kobena Mercer (London: InIVA and MIT Press, 2005), 168–89.

14 In light of scant textual evidence in the extant *Studio International* archive, the account of the nonappearance of Oiticica’s essay narrated here relies on oral histories conducted with its editor and assistant editor of the period (Peter Townsend and Charles Harrison, respectively). Melvin worked with Townsend to create box lists of the archive’s contents prior to its acquisition by the Tate in 2002. The discussions with Townsend were recorded or noted from 1996 to 2002. The discussions with Harrison were recorded on March 28, 2007; October 31, 2007; June 10, 2008; and July 14, 2008.

To do this, he introduced a series of reforms, including making significant changes to the magazine's format. Wanting to include younger writers, he asked the art historian Alan Bowness, who taught at London's Courtauld Institute of Art, to recommend lively research students to write for the magazine (one of whom was Charles Harrison, who went on to take up the formal position of assistant editor in September 1967). Townsend introduced an approach—unusual for the mainstream art press in the UK at the time—that involved bypassing art critics and art historians and going directly to artists, giving them magazine space to present their work in a relatively unmediated way. The most high-profile manifestation of this wider commitment was Townsend's institution of a new subsection of each issue of the magazine handed over to commissioned artists to do with as they wished: to make art for publication, for example, or to write an open-ended statement.<sup>15</sup> Townsend also made it a policy to surround himself with young artists and writers in order to hear what was currently preoccupying them, in this way keeping abreast of current and emerging ideas in the field. It was through one such young writer—Guy Brett—that Townsend was introduced to Oiticica's work, initially at the Signals Gallery in London, and subsequently (and more extensively) at Oiticica's 1969 Whitechapel Gallery exhibition curated by Brett.<sup>16</sup>

- 
- 15 Notable commissions for these "artist's pages" in the second half of the 1960s included Barry Flanagan, "Biennale des Jeunes," *Studio International* 174, no. 892 (September 1967): 98–99; John Latham with Charles Harrison, "Where Does the Collision Happen?," *Studio International* 175, no. 900 (May 1968): 258–61; and Sol LeWitt, "Drawing Series 1968 (Fours)," *Studio International* 177, no. 910 (April 1969): 189. Townsend also instituted artist-designed covers, which, although honorific, some artists considered to be as significant as a solo exhibition (according to Liliane Lijn in an interview with Jo Melvin, June 26, 2007; Lijn designed the cover for the May 1969 issue of *Studio International*).
- 16 In the 1960s, Brett was involved with the exhibition space and art bulletin *Signals*, which promoted the work of many international artists. *Signals* was initially run out of an apartment in London's Cornwall Gardens by Brett, Paul Keeler (the apartment's owner), and the artists David Medalla, Gustav Metzger, and Marcello Salvadori. It subsequently moved to a dedicated gallery space in Wigmore Street, London, in November 1964. Townsend's elder brother William, then Professor of Painting at the Slade School of Fine Art, introduced him to the Signals Gallery and its bulletin, and it was on a visit to the gallery in September 1965 that Brett showed Townsend Oiticica's work for the first time, during a group exhibition called Soundings 2 held between July 22 and September 22, 1965. (William Townsend refers to the visit in his journal, vol. xxxvi [August 1965–March 1966], September 8, 1965, entry, viewable at the UCL Special Collections department.) Brett also informed Townsend of plans for a solo exhibition of Oiticica's work at Signals. The Signals Gallery closed at the end of 1966, however, after losing its financial backing (from Paul Keeler's father), ending Brett's plans of holding a solo show for Oiticica there. For a detailed account of this entire period, see Brett and Figueiredo, *Oiticica in London*.

Townsend was impressed by Oiticica's work, both on initial viewing and after the Whitechapel show, which he recounted as finding "extraordinary," although he admitted he did not know how to "make sense of it."<sup>17</sup>

Even though he did not write regularly for *Studio International*, Brett was a respected interlocutor of Townsend's and, together with Paul Keeler of the Signals Gallery, a frequent visitor to the editor in his office. Charles Harrison, by then assistant editor of the magazine, went so far as to describe the tone of these meetings (to which he was not invited) as "conspiratorial."<sup>18</sup> Townsend also enjoyed associating with other artists involved with Signals, including Marcello Salvadori, David Medalla, and Gustav Metzger, and, unlike Harrison, valued their diverse experimental approaches, giving each of them space in the magazine under the rubric of its "Artist's Pages."<sup>19</sup>

It is highly likely, therefore, that Townsend invited Oiticica to contribute "The Senses Pointing toward a New Transformation" to the magazine after his Whitechapel show in 1969, and that this invited article, given its December 22 submission date by Oiticica, would have been published at the earliest in the March 1970 issue of *Studio International* (the magazine operated with at least a two-month advance commissioning schedule, and sometimes much longer).<sup>20</sup>

In December 1969, however, Townsend took an extended leave of absence from the editorship, and Harrison was put in the position of overseeing the magazine's production for the January, February, and March issues. Several mistakes are known to have occurred during Townsend's absence, including the fact that nothing was done with

17 "Interview with Guy Brett," Viva Voices, University of the Arts London, [www.vivavoices.org/website.asp?page=Interviews](http://www.vivavoices.org/website.asp?page=Interviews).

18 Jo Melvin, interview with Harrison, March 28, 2007.

19 See, for example, Marcello Salvadori, Erica Marx, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Julio Le Parc, Frank Malina, Kenneth Martin, David Medalla, Lev Nusberg, Jesús Rafael Soto, Jeffrey Steele, Takis, and Stephen Willats, "Statements on Kinetic Art," *Studio International* 173, no. 886 (February 1967): 60–64. Harrison did not support the Signals artists and was irritated by what he regarded as Townsend's "timewasting" when the magazine had pressing deadlines.

20 At *Studio International*, commissions from artists more frequently germinated via undocumented discussion, rather than formally by letter. Although there is no documentation demonstrating a specific Oiticica commission for the Artist's Pages in the extant *Studio International* archive, this commission was recalled by Townsend in conversation with Melvin (May 17, 2000) and corroborated by Oiticica's correspondence with the artist Jill Drower (TGA 201418/3).



THE SENSES POINTING TOWARDS A NEW TRANSFORMATION  
Hélio Oiticica

The process of shifting the main aesthetic focus away from the so called "visual" arts and the introduction, then, of the other senses, should not be concentrated or looked at from a purely aesthetic point of view; it is much more profound; it is a process which, in its ultimate sense, relates and proposes a new unconditioned behaviour possibility: the consciousness of behaviour as a fundamental key to the evolution of the so-called art processes → the consciousness of a totality, of the relation individual-world as a whole action, where the idea of value is not only related to a specific 'focus': the aestheticist event taken formerly as the 'focus goal': the conflicts tend to be absorbed into behaviour itself, away from the super intellectualist visual focus, too submitted to that 'focus-value' relation. The appeal to the senses, which can be a 'multi-focal' concentration, becomes important as a way towards this behavioural absorption: smell-sight-taste-hearing and touch single and are what Merleau-Ponty once called the "body's general symbolics", where all sense relations are established in a human context, as a "body" of significations and not a sum of significations apprehended by specific channels! The apprehension and the action cannot be isolated, and the analytical idea of the senses becomes a metaphor too to express the complexity of human behaviour. But, we emerge from purely rational, 'objectal relations' of art-problems, of established conditions for an "aesthetic action" so much developed during so many years, into the idea of a whole human world, into the trust in behavioural action as a creative force and not a 'passive' or 'background' one: the dissolution of "art" into it is not also an 'objectal dissolution' but a fusing of concentrated specific ideas, fundamental problem-creative ideas, into life manifestation as far as the infinite area of human behaviour is concerned, as a building up of significations, symbolic bodies of relations, so rich in themselves and reinforced then, by this new significative body spread-growing from its former sublime position, into its former 'background', which is the behaviour world.

Of course past art always tried in a metaphorical way to create, and did create, a new level of significative relations: a world in itself could be felt and lived and proposed as an structure, a creative structure, opposite the objectal world, as a "model" of synthetic truth, uncorrupted in itself. Often then, mostly I should say, the artist-creator would be the actor-creator, the sublime generator of creative forces and the recipient of them, he himself the pole of the structural significative world proposed by his creations. The great difference in a new position would be

Hélio Oiticica.

"The Senses Pointing toward  
a New Transformation," 1969.

Manuscript addressed to  
*Studio International* magazine.

Typescript on paper.

Image courtesy of the  
Projeto Hélio Oiticica.

(The senses pointing towards... cont.)

2

that, whereas the former links were metaphorical-structural totalities imposed onto the behavioural world, the actual ones tend to grow from it after a long process of dissolution of 'living human acts' → the destiny of human living acts meet themselves without intermediary sublimatory efforts, transcendental conflicts or ideal goals.

As a stage in the evolution of these "living act processes" we can point to the dissolution of old art forms, painting, sculpture, etc., into the hybrid "object". But all through the modern evolution of art the conflict between the idea of an "art-object" and an "anti-art" has been moving towards an impasse. Antiart, taken recently to dramatic forms, to the 'edge of experience', now demands a definitive radicalisation. Many initiatives have stood still or gone back in relation to this impasse; the urgency for a new field of considerations is felt — the concentration on the process itself is a beginning of a new light that gradually invades and creates those considerations: I call it, in my experimental efforts, a subbehaviour it is not simply "creative behaviour", although it can be, but something much more amplified; not an object-creation through behaviour, nor the transformation of living acts into creative ones, which would be a simplistic idea: in such a case the conditions would only become distant Utopias, but, if from inside conditioned behaviour, the elements start to grow as necessities, like germs which burst from the center of the conflicts themselves, the and informs behaviour in a new open way, completely at large with individual lived-acts: the process which conducts and informs towards the center of behaviour conflict itself and opens into surprising transformations → not to be content with the effort to "attain a model" of life, but to live in a continuous consciousness of such conflicts, which could be the only way for such a transforming process to take place.

The appeal to the aid of the sensorial ensemble lives further on than the objectal one: the consciousness of "body symbolics" as a totality immediately "at hand", is something much more related to behaviour itself than to objectal relations; a richer relation which increases lived possibilities-probabilities in the immediate consciousness of 'body totality' in action; when Lygia Clark, for instance, proposes her experience of the 'body nostalgia', she is proposing, through simple sensorial acts, a possibility for a re-informed consciousness of the body as something alive, as if discovered for the first time, thus proposing also a new relation between self-knowledge and knowledge of others. Here we can see the possibility of a process rather than an object-structure imposing metaphorical relations; it could be a living sense discovery, itself a process and not a process for a goal. The senses

Oiticica's article.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to Townsend's enthusiastic noncomprehension of Oiticica's work, Harrison was openly dismissive of this artist's practice, finding it uninteresting and "not art," and disparaging about the Signals Gallery artists more generally.<sup>22</sup>

The final reason for the nonappearance of Oiticica's prepared article is, however, obscure, since it remained unpublished even after Townsend's return to the editorship.<sup>23</sup> The most likely reason for its nonpublication was simply that it did not register as comprehensible to editors discursively habituated within the Anglophone neo-avant-gardes, for whom it proved literally untranslatable (despite being authored in English). The essay was consequently excluded from the magazine, despite the fact that it had been specially invited, without any explanation ever being provided to its author.<sup>24</sup>

### THE UNSUFFICIENCY OF THE ART OBJECT

How, then, should we read "The Senses Pointing toward a New Transformation" today? Oiticica's text sets out a proposal for the "definitive radicalization" of anti-art that he held to be necessary, in light of the impasse reached by the longstanding conflict between object-based, formalist art and its various neo-avant-garde negations (within both the Brazilian and international neo-avant-gardes). Oiticica encapsulates this situation with the notable formula "the unsufficiency of the art-object as such."<sup>25</sup> For the artist writing in the late 60s, after both Neoconcretism

- 
- 21 Another notable error was the way in which Lucy Lippard's magazine exhibition project "Groups" was presented in the March 1970 issue: in order to save space, the images and accompanying texts were compressed and became illegible, and Robert Barry's text was left out.
  - 22 Jo Melvin, interview with Harrison, March 28, 2007. Harrison's position reflected his growing commitment to the specific position taken by analytic Conceptual art, which came to preclude endorsing any practices outside of its ambit (an issue over which he subsequently felt compelled to resign his assistant editorship of *Studio International* in 1971).
  - 23 Given the lack of a copy of Oiticica's work in the *Studio International* archive, we cannot definitely establish that the article was posted by Jill Drower and made it to the magazine, as Oiticica had instructed in his correspondence with Drower.
  - 24 Braga records that Oiticica continued chasing the text well into 1970. Braga, "Conceitualismo e Vivência," 212
  - 25 While the locution "unsufficiency" could be considered an error of English usage (since nouns of Latin origin conventionally take the prefix "in-"), we claim that, rather, it should be read as registering Oiticica's profound linguistic and conceptual inventiveness by way of its distortion of "correct" English. This is because "un-" also carries the sense of "the reverse of" (as well as the sense of "the absence of"), which "in-" lacks, and thus more accurately registers the emphatic, ethically and politically invested overturning of objecthood at stake in the period.

and Minimalism, it was now the *process* of art-making itself that had to be rethought, and he did so by encouraging a form of what he called “crebehavior.” Through this neologism, Oiticica attempted to push beyond the investment in process over end product at stake in Robert Morris’s “Anti-form” work of the period (which remained invested in what Morris describes as the “particularization” of form by aleatory means), as well as Allan Kaprow’s extension of the participatory stakes of the “happening” (which retained a residual relation to the notion of the score, derived from its roots in Fluxus instruction pieces).

Crebehavior is a complex notion. As Oiticica is at pains to point out, it does not imply a simplistic project for the dissolution of art into a generalized creativity and a harmonious fusion of art and life, such that it could be dismissed as misguidedly “utopian.” Rather, Oiticica’s notion of crebehavior seeks to reveal the routinized character of everyday life (“conditioned behavior”) and to propose an immanent transformation of the same via a change in everyday behavioral patterns, shifting them into crebehavior. This transformation of conditioned behavior into crebehavior is envisaged as potentially capable of sparking a broader sociopolitical transformation and is thus not limited to an immediate, localized overcoming of alienated social conditions.

Oiticica’s term for the practice and the experience of time opened up by crebehavior is “creleisure,” and the artist offers one of the fullest explorations of this concept in “The Senses Pointing toward a New Transformation.” Combining the senses of creativity, faith, leisure, and pleasure, this concept and its associated practice aim to move beyond the repressive opposition of work and leisure that characterizes industrial and “postindustrial” modernity, in order to overcome social alienation. This was to be effected via the “absorption of art-processes into life-processes,” as a “way to battle oppressive systematic ways of life” through a practice engaging all of the senses (as opposed to analytic Conceptual art’s anti-aesthetic asceticism). As Oiticica explains it, creleisure is characterized by “taking hold of a process, a sympathetic creative process, where sense-apprehension is body-apprehension which generates behavior-action, in a total organic process.”

Crucially, creleisure also has to be understood as the culmination—at the time he wrote the article—of the evolution of Oiticica’s practice to date, work that was self-avowedly understood to be structurally intertwined with the evolution of the Brazilian neo-avant-garde but that also constitutively responded to developments in the international

neo-avant-gardes. The crucial move at stake in creleisure was twofold. It marked a shift away from the spatialization and associated "behavioralization" of art that had been at stake in his earlier articulation of the non-object and parangolé concepts and works ("total structures conditioning behavior total-structures," as Oiticica notes in the text<sup>26</sup>), but also what he calls "the reverse of that," involving the prioritization of (cre)behavior and a demotion of its inevitable, enabling spatial forms. These forms are now largely conceived as ancillary, non-art, and to a large degree even epiphenomenal ("behavior set as a total-structure, generating the elements which are not art total structures"). In his emphasis on behavior as a "total-structure" that is "not art," Oiticica's conception can be distinguished from the cybernetics-influenced proposals for elaborating an interactive, behavioral art outlined by his contemporaries (including Roy Ascott's "The Construction of Change" from 1964, and Stephen Willats's "The Artist as a Structurist of Behaviour" from 1969).<sup>27</sup>

Ultimately, Oiticica summarizes creleisure in terms of "the flowing alive experience of human destiny"—that is, as a practice that involves the potential instantiation of art's aesthetic promise (one opposed to a facile aestheticism). Rather than to produce objects that occasioned aesthetic response, Oiticica sought, in a Neo-Schillerian sense, to realize the freedom suggested by the free play of the faculties of the individual's mind in aesthetic response, prefiguring (as they did for Schiller in his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*) the possibility of social relations that were not characterized by domination. This is not to be understood as an aestheticization of everyday life, but rather as a realization *and* dissolution of art that responds to what Guy Debord took to be the challenge for art after the failures of the Dada and Surrealist avant-gardes. In *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord announces that "Dadaism wanted *to suppress art without realizing it*; surrealism wanted *to realize art without suppressing it*"; for Debord, however, what was necessary was both suppression *and* realization, as "inseparable aspects of a single *supersession of art*."<sup>28</sup> This dual realization and

26 All of the underlining in Oiticica's article are original emphases that have been preserved here.

27 Roy Ascott, "The Construction of Change," *Cambridge Opinion* 41 ("Modern Art in Britain" special issue, 1964): 37–42. Stephen Willats, "The Artist as a Structurist of Behaviour," *Control*, no. 5 (1969): unpaginated.

28 Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Fredy Perlman and John Supak (Detroit: Black & Red, 1977), §191.

dissolution of art in its “supersession” was in turn exactly what Oiticica proposed in creleisure.<sup>29</sup>

Having gained some insight into the challenging conceptual character of creleisure, it is essential to emphasize that the concept was realized only in and through particular contexts of practice. Oiticica’s work moved through a number of discrete, though related, phases that were at once conceptual and practical, some of which he acknowledged had been originated by others (most particularly Ferreira Gullar’s theory of the *non-object* and Rogerio Duarte’s *probject*). Each concept had its own distinctive articulation, and each was realized in and through one or more series of works. For Oiticica the concept was elaborated via the process of making, rather than conceived as ontologically prior to this process. Indeed, from his commitment to Gullar’s notion of the non-object onward, Oiticica insisted that the individual art objects that he produced should not be understood as the work (for this would reify his art); rather, Oiticica’s “works” after 1959 should be understood as particular manifestations of conceptually articulated practices. In the catalog for his Whitechapel Gallery exhibition, produced earlier in 1969, Oiticica explicitly set out the conceptual development of his work from 1959 to 1969 in a diagram: concepts were dated, with specific series of works located under them. The successive conceptual phases of Oiticica’s work developed out of his attempt to resolve the conceptual challenges raised by the preceding phases. His work represented a philosophical unfurling of conceptual categories and was quite explicitly dialectical in this sense—each concept sublated one or more previous ones—and thus has to be understood in its conceptual *movement*.<sup>30</sup>

However, the Whitechapel schema itself lists no specific works or series under the concept of creleisure, despite the fact that Oiticica

- 
- 29 It is likely that Oiticica had read *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) at the time he wrote “The Senses Pointing toward a New Transformation,” in the wake of the events of 1968 for which Debord’s text was instrumental. Oiticica’s first explicit citation of Debord does not occur until 1971, however. On this issue, see Braga, “Conceitualismo e Vivência,” 216.
- 30 Oiticica read deeply in the continental philosophical tradition from an early age, and philosophical aesthetics informed his artistic studies from the beginning. “Oiticica,” as Mari-Carmen Ramírez has observed, “was a master dialectician: the specific problems posed by each proposal or series were eventually negated and resolved into an ephemeral synthesis.” Mari-Carmen Ramírez, “Hélio’s Double-Edged Challenge,” in *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Colour*, 18. While Ramírez is correct to insist on Oiticica as a “master dialectician,” her own description of dialectics as “synthesis” fails to emphasize the sense of *Aufhebung* (sublation) integral to the movement of the dialectic and inherent to Oiticica’s practice.

acknowledges that it was first formulated as he prepared the *Eden* project for the Whitechapel show: "The idea of creleisure (crelazer in Portuguese) arises slowly with the Eden concept, in fact it is its profound sense."<sup>31</sup> Consequently, the works that instantiated the concept of creleisure have to be ascertained in another way. The *Eden* project consisted of an immersive, sand-delimited spatial environment featuring distinct clusters of small inhabitable box structures separated from each other by translucent curtains. The project inaugurated a distinctive cellular *behavioral-spatial* typology that Oiticica generically termed "nests." These "nests" subsequently characterized the basic organizational unit of many of the works that he made to instantiate and explore the concept and practice—or, rather, the conflated concept/practice—of creleisure.

The practice of creleisure that he elaborated at the Whitechapel would shortly inspire a break with the art institution and gallery system altogether and accelerate his hopes for widespread emancipation through an aesthetically inspired "social uprising." As he would subsequently make clear in "The Senses Pointing toward a New Transformation," "[t]he impossibility of 'exhibiting' objects . . . , in galleries or museums, has become evident. . . . We are in the beginning of a new language, a new world of experiences in communication and proposing a complete revolution toward an individual-social uprising." With creleisure, Oiticica modeled nothing less than a radical rethinking of the concept of *aesthetic* revolution: just as in the revolutionary *foco* strategy, where small cells of revolutionaries create a focus for more widespread popular uprisings, the individual cells or "nests" of creleisure were to multiply and propagate, building strength and sparking overthrow of the repressive regime of alienated everyday life.<sup>32</sup>

\* \* \*

The fact that Oiticica's document was not published in *Studio International* in 1970—apparently on grounds relating to the text's opacity, despite having been welcomed and almost certainly directly commissioned by an interested editor—resulted in the suppression of a text that Oiticica was justly convinced held real significance for the international art scene at the time. The nonappearance of Oiticica's text

31 Hélio Oiticica, *Hélio Oiticica* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1969), exhibition catalog, unpaginated. Reproduced in Brett and Figueiredo, *Oiticica in London*.

32 For a fuller discussion of this issue, see Skrebowski, "Revolution in the Aesthetic Revolution."



reveals a fundamental inability to situate the artist's distinctive mode of thinking and making within the Anglophone neo-avant-garde discourse of the period. However, the particular untimely timeliness of Oiticica's article is, we suggest, precisely due to its delayed public appearance. Rather than conceiving of its publication as a way of reclaiming the past, as if the passage of time had not occurred, or entertaining facile speculation about possible counterhistories, we publish "The Senses Pointing toward a New Transformation" here as something that returns to us from the present, as something that intervenes in contemporary debates about the character of the global neo-avant-gardes. The clearer view of the radicality of Oiticica's category of creleisure that it affords us challenges the assimilation of Oiticica's own practice within expanded histories of the neo-avant-garde that nonetheless continue to privilege canonical frames (Pop, Minimalism, Conceptualism). Here the distinctive creolization of languages and theoretical traditions at play in Oiticica's writing—its refusal to translate itself into hegemonic categories—renders it highly material as a methodological exemplar for the ongoing project of revision that is at stake in global art history.